Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

INSIDE TRACKS

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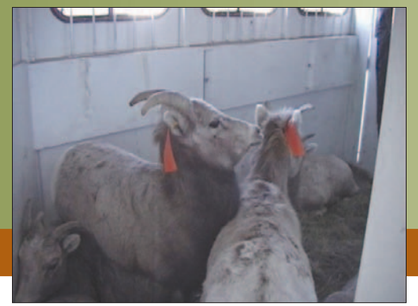

Bighorn Sheep Transplanted onto the Kootenai Falls Sheep Range

By Jerry Brown, FWP Wildlife Biologist, Libby

Efforts to increase bighorn sheep numbers on the Kootenai Falls sheep range were completed during the winter of 2004. In two separate operations, a total of 24 additional bighorn sheep were released onto the Kootenai Falls Wildlife Management Area on January 4, and February 23, 2004. The first group of sheep consisted of 7 adult ewes, 4 female lambs and 1 male lamb, all of which were trapped in a corral trap located on Castle Reef near Gibson Reservoir on the Sun River just west of Augusta, Montana. Those sheep were trapped on January 3 and transported to the release site near Libby on January 4, 2004.

The second group of bighorns, another dozen animals, also came from the Castle Reef area, but were all captured during a helicopter net-gunning operation on February 23, 2004. Those animals consisted of 11 adult ewes and 1 female lamb, all of which were transported to the release site that same day. All transplanted sheep arrived at the release site in good condition, and all were wearing visible ear tags. Three adult ewes were also equipped with telemetry collars.

Having the introduced animals visibly marked helps us determine their wanderings and success or failure of the transplant effort. It is not uncommon for recently transplanted big game animals to travel extensively in search of something familiar in their new home. These bighorn sheep were no exceptions. Some left the transplant area and were seen as far north as the South Fork of the Yaak. An ewe and two lambs from the January 4 group of sheep swam the Kootenai River and took up residence along the railroad tracks and Highway 200. The two lambs were killed by a train in late January. The adult ewe that was with them has been tranquilized twice and returned to the sheep range on the north side of the river, only to swim the river and relocate along the railroad tracks on both occasions. Many other transplanted individuals have remained on the area, but may begin wandering during favorable spring weather.

The resident Kootenai Falls bighorn sheep population suffered a severe decline during the winter of 1994-95, and has been struggling to regain previous population levels. Hopefully, these recent infusions of additional ewes will provide the numbers necessary to turn the population towards recovery.

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Gill Nets - An Important Tool for Fisheries Managers

By Scott Rumsey, FWP Fisheries Biologist, Kalispell

Gill netting has been a form of passive capture techniques utilized by people throughout the world over the centuries as a means for gathering food fish. It also has widespread use by fisheries professionals as an effective means for monitoring and managing fisheries.

Gill nets are simple entangling nets that are important and cost effective tools that can be employed with minimal personnel and equipment (usually a small boat and two people). Gill nets help fisheries workers collect precise data from a variety of different fish species in a given body of water.

What is a "gill net"? A gill net is a panel of mesh netting, generally made of nylon or monofilament with a buoyant "float line" at the top and a weighted "lead line" at its bottom. One end is anchored in place, the net is stretched in a straight line and the opposite end is anchored. Buoys are placed along its length to mark its location and warn boaters of its presence. The standard gill nets employed by FWP are generally called an "experimental design" that are 125 feet long and 6 feet deep and have five evenly graduated mesh panels typically ranging from $^{3}/_{4}$ inch at one end, increasing to 2 inches at the other end. This variation in mesh sizes enables the net to capture a wide range of species, sizes and ages of fish. The nets can be floated at the waters surface, suspended in the water column, or anchored along the bottom of the water body, be it a lake, reservoir or river.

Fish caught by gill nets usually become entangled by their gill covers, teeth and/or spines. Usually fish attempt to swim through the net, get their heads and gill covers through but not their bodies, resulting in the fish becoming "gilled". Nets may be set for short durations with low fish mortality or more often overnight which leads to higher mortality except for some individuals that are barely entangled thus allowing successful release.

Fisheries workers in Montana use information gathered from the use of gill nets to monitor the quantity and quality of fish in a body of water. Fish size, sex, species composition, juvenile recruitment, age structure, growth rates, health status, stomach contents, and population structure are a few examples of information used in management that is often obtained by netting. In lakes that are maintained through stocking, gill netting can also help determine stocking densities, survival rates, strain evaluation, species interactions, and return to the anglers. Much of this data cannot be obtained by simply interviewing anglers and observing their fish. Adequate sample sizes must be collected for accurate data and in many cases all spe-

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Hunter/ Bowhunter Education Instructors Receive Service Awards

At the recent spring instructors' workshop, Hunter and Bowhunter Education Instructors received awards for service in the Hunter and Bowhunter Education Program. A highlight was Frank Sichting's 30-year service award, for which he received an engraved pistol. The following instructors received awards:

5-year Bowhunter Instructor Award (plaque): Dan Atkinson, Peter Drowne, Harold Hudson, George Lyons, Jerry Smith, and Roger Smith.

10-year Bowhunter Instructor Award (plaque and engraved knife): Richard Anderson, Timothy Darr, Robert Howard, Ron Nail, Larry Rattray, and Matthew Riley.

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Service Awards

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15-year Bowhunter Instructor Award (plaque): Mark Mason, Mark Natale, Danny Place.

5-year Hunter Education Instructor Award (plaque): Daniel Bothwell, Willa Burgess, Wayne Crismore, Robert Friedman, Kirk Gordon, Kent Griffin, Thomas Horelick, Harlen Johnson, Michael Johnson, James Jones, Ron Kazmierczak, Anne King, Rud Knudsen, Richard Miller, Robert Rice, Joseph Rocheleau, Tony Santorno, Jerry Smith, Samuel Tomas, Hannah Willman, and Ned Winebrenner.

10-year Hunter Education Award (plaque and engraved knife): Serena Atkinson, Bobbi Burgess, John Burgess, Paul Charbonneau, Jon Cuthbertson, Timothy Darr, Patrick Flanary, Michael Gannon, John Mee, Larry Rattray, Dale Sommerfield, Wayne Stevens, and TimTheir.

15-year Hunter Education Award (plaque): Bruce Clark and Ron Nail.

LONG SERVICE!

Instructor Pat McVay conducts his Hunter Education field day east of Kalispell in mid March. McVay, Montana's first Hunter Education Instructor, has now taught for 47 years.

30-year Hunter Education Award (plaque and engraved pistol): Frank Sichting.

Warden's Special Award: This is a new award presented by FWP Region One Wardens for outstanding service to Montana's hunters. Warden Chris Ralph presented the plaque and knife to Instructor Tom Horelick of Libby for the Lincoln County award. For the Flathead County award, Lee Anderson presented the plaque and knife to Instructor Leonard Howke of Whitefish.

Gill Nets

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cies and sizes of fish are not effectively collected by anglers. Analysis of fish specimens may also involve use of their organs, tissue and gut contents which is often unattainable from anglers. Although gill netting is often a lethal means of capturing fish, edible fish in good condition are distributed to food banks after appropriate data are collected.

GILL NET STUDIES

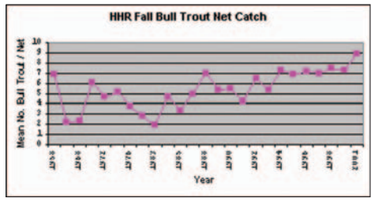
Biologists pull in a gill net and retrieve fish to measure and count. About half of the fish captured in gill nets can be released alive.

The number of fish removed with gill nets is actually a very small percentage of a total population. Typically game fish collected in gill nets add up to the daily catchable limit of only a handful of fishermen. To further offset game fish mortality nets are used at a low frequency to minimize impacts.

High use lakes in the Flathead Valley may require monitoring with gill nets on a more frequent basis (once to twice per year) for effective monitoring. Lakes with less angling pressure, such as most of the high mountain lakes, may require only very occasional netting to get an accurate idea of fisheries condition. In FWP Region One, (northwest Montana) there are 418 lakes containing fish. Of these lakes, there are 210 (50%) that are stocked by FWP annually or on a rotational basis.

Gill nets are a very important tool to fisheries managers that allow them to make informed decisions on fishing opportunities for the public.

Bull trout trends in Hungry Horse Reservoir are now measured annually in the fall in three areas. Three sinking nets are used in each area (9 total sinking nets) to develop the information shown below. Typically, more than half of these fish are measured and released alive. The number of bull trout killed is a small fraction of the total population in the reservoir. This chart illustrates the value of long term monitoring so the fishery can be managed.



The information illustrates the relatively few fish that are captured in order to collect this important information. Another way to illustrate this is as follows: The length of the bull trout nets combined (and only fished one night each fall) is 1,125 feet in a reservoir measuring 184,800 feet in length. Also, the nets measure only 6-feet deep.

The increasing trend showed by bull trout net catches in part allowed FWP to establish a bull trout fishing season for Hungry Horse Reservoir for the first time in years. This year, anglers will be able to fish for bull trout on the reservoir and keep 2 for the season under a "catch card" system.

Aids to Navigation Explained in New Boating Rules

The new Montana Boating Laws booklet contains an explanation of the aids to navigation rules that were developed from a bill passed by the Montana Legislature. Individuals and non-profit organizations may identify hazards on state waterways by placing a sign or marker at the hazard. Only FWP approved signs, markers or buoys may be used to mark a hazard. A white plastic milk jug attached by a cord to the hazard may also be used. The sign or marker must:

- Display the name and telephone number of the individual or organization that placed it;
- Be maintained or removed by the individual or nonprofit organization when dictated by changing water conditions or seasonal changes;
- Be placed only to signal a hazard in the waterway. They may not be used to mark swim areas, safe channels, speed limits or water skiing courses;
- Be located on state waterways. They are not allowed on navigable waters with federal jurisdiction. For example, in northwest Montana, they are allowed on Flathead Lake and the Flathead River. However, Lake Koocanusa and the Kootenai River are considered federally navigable, and the milk jugs are not allowed. Only Coast Guard approved buoys are allowed; check with the local Coast Guard Auxiliary for more information.

A Little Luck and a Big Buck for a Guy Named Boo Boo

By Buzz Isfeld, FWP Citizen Advisor, Kalispell

Nils Torheim (Boo Boo) and his father, Harold (Pops), are well known on Flathead Lake for their good luck at catching Lake trout. They are equally well known for bringing home meat, but not usually with big antlers. Pops is a retired commercial fisherman. He and Boo Boo are mechanics when not enjoying fishing and hunting.

NICE BUCK

Nils Torheim and the fine whitetail buck that he bagged in 2003.

Boo Boo uses a wheel chair and requires the assistance of his father. He would want me to say that Pops requires his good counsel on most matters. Friends or family, they are two of the best matched fishing and hunting partners you can find.

In order for Boo Boo to hunt he must be on a modified ATV or in a truck. He operates both with hand controls. He must fulfill a lot of requirements to hunt in this manner: get a form from FWP, have a doctor certify his disability, send the form to FWP for processing, receive his certification and disability stickers, attach them to the vehicles, and learn the special rules for hunting from a vehicle.

Where to go is no small matter. If he wants to approximate the experience of walking through the woods, he uses the ATV. It's noisy and he's not able to leave the trail like an able-bodied hunter. He has to study the laws/policies of the state and Federal land. If he chooses to go where "road hunters" can't access, he can visit our good friends at Stoltze and Plum Creek Timber companies, or he can access designated state or federal roads. He must visit each organization, find the right person, show his certification, sign in, get scheduled, obtain a key, and then return the key after his hunting experience. All this he does with a real smile and appreciation.

Boo Boo didn't see the best fishing this year and he missed an opportunity on a grand bear. His expectations remained low when he got "blizzarded out" of an antelope hunt. With all the year's preparations and his share of medium luck he takes a low odds trip onto his neighbor's property only to shoot the buck of a lifetime. So what's the lesson?

Profile...

My First Fur Trapping Experience

By Katherine Ohlson, Trapper Education Student

" MOM! I GOT SOMETHING!" I shouted as I raced back down my trapline to where she was standing. This was my first catch and I was quite excited. I had taken a trapping class with Fish, Wildlife & Parks a couple weeks before in early December and was getting really down in the dumps that I couldn't use my skinning information. After the class I borrowed and bought two #1 foothold traps and made and borrowed two boxtraps. The one I made was twenty pounds (too heavy) and the hole was an inch too big. I was only trying to catch weasels (ermine) and the box and hole were big enough to catch a marten. But that didn't stop me from still setting it.

When I got my license my mom and I went out to look for tracks. We had asked our neighbor if we could trap on their property and that's where we found the tracks. They were all over the place! We decided to set the trap and left. Three weeks later I still hadn't caught anything, but as I walked down the trail this time, I had something. " Hurry Up Mom, I Caught Something!" I shouted as I ran towards her. " Well, what are we waiting for?" she shouted and we ran back down the trail toward the trap. When we got there, it had it's head sticking out of the box and was looking at us. We just stared at him and him at us for a while. Then mom asked me slowly, "Well. What are we going to do?" "I need to dispatch it before we do anything else." I answered, and went ahead and did so.

Katherine Ohlson proudly displays her male weasel pelt (turned inside out on the stretcher),

After we checked the rest of the trapline, I ran home to tell my dad. We washed the ermine and discovered a beautiful snowy white weasel. I couldn't believe it. I had finally caught him! Hurray! I called John Fraley from Fish and Game to tell him. He had been advising me about trapping the whole time. "Bring it over and I'll help you skin him," he said over the phone when I told him. I had already told John that we thought the weasel was a female, so when we got to his house, he explaned it was a large male long-tailed weasel. When we skinned the ermine and put him on the stretcher, we realized just how big he was. Not just a regular 12 inches, he was 24 inches from nose to tail! The weasel, (now Mr. Weasel,) sits proudly in my bedroom, my first, and biggest catch!

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Katherine is being humble here. This long-tailed weasel was huge, and I mean huge! This large male fits into the category of "chicken killer." I have never seen a weasel even close to the size of this male. Longtailed weasels have been known to kill up to a dozen large chickens in one night. Katherine has herself a great pelt, and we at FWP are proud of the way she took what she learned in the trapper education* class and applied it successfully. Katherine is tanning the weasel pelt herself and will use it to make a decorative craft.